

February 20, 2003

The Honorable Cynthia Sullivan  
Chair, King County Council  
Room 1200  
C O U R T H O U S E

Dear Councilmember Sullivan:

I am pleased to transmit to the Council an ordinance authorizing a May 20, 2003 ballot measure that will provide funding to protect the public's investment in King County parks. The ballot measure would authorize King County to levy an additional property tax of five cents per \$1,000 of assessed valuation for a period of six years. This levy will generate \$11.8 million in year 2004 in revenue for support of the operation and maintenance of King County's regional and rural parks, trails and open space--parks enjoyed by all residents of King County.

In response to our state's challenging economic climate, I feel it is most appropriate to forward a very modest levy proposal to the Council. This proposal would cost the owner of a house valued at \$250,000 an amount of \$12.50 a year, in order to support over 25,000 acres of parks, active recreation facilities, open space and trails. The specific parks, trails and facilities supported by the levy are listed at *Attachment A*.

The levy I propose today is slightly smaller than that recommended by the Metropolitan Parks Task Force earlier this month --5 cents rather than 5.5 cents. This reduced levy rate will support the goals identified by the Task Force, but also reflect our economic challenges and keep pressure on the Parks Division to continue its success to date in becoming more entrepreneurial and less dependent on tax subsidy. The levy rate of 5 cents will provide an average of \$1.2 million a year above the amount estimated to necessary to maintain regional and rural parks at their current reduced levels. Consistent with the Task Force recommendations, I recommend that this small increment of funding be dedicated to improving maintenance levels in regional and rural parks, providing a contingency for such maintenance costs, and enabling modest continued funding for recreational grants to community-based organizations. The specific improvements that can be achieved through dedicating a majority of this increment to maintenance enhancements are described at *Attachment B*.

I want to commend the Task Force for their extensive and careful study. Their recommendations, as well as the successes of the Parks Division (outlined in *Attachment C*) are a reflection of outstanding work over the past seven months. While the Task Force found that remarkable progress has been made in a few short months to transform the County parks system operations, to implement innovative business practices and efficiencies, to undertake entrepreneurial ventures and provide non-tax revenues to support parks, they also found that King County parks continue to face significant financial challenges.

Indeed, the Parks Division 2003 budget is over 40% lower than the 2001 Parks budget. Parks maintenance levels have suffered as a result. The 2003 budget no longer includes funding for painters to paint over graffiti. It also reduced the number of carpenters available to replace broken windows and preserve capital assets.

Without question, these are basic items we all wish to support, but these items will continue to be at risk, or simply absent, as we deal with ongoing Current Expense budget shortfalls in excess of \$20 million each year.

There is nothing left to cut if we are to preserve the County parks system. Major additional parks closures are inevitable if new funding is not provided in 2004 and beyond. The regional investment in our park system deserves our support. I believe the most responsible thing to do at this point is to seek the approval of the voters for this 5-cent levy. This is a significantly smaller levy rate than similar parks measures in recent years (*See Attachment D*).

An important part of my recommendation today is a commitment to fund local, unincorporated urban area parks out of existing County revenues. As the Task Force recommended, the levy must be focused on the County's long-term priorities: regional and rural parks. The balance of the system—estimated to cost approximately \$3 million a year-- can and should be addressed through other means.

Some will ask why I am proposing this levy now, rather than wait for the Budget Advisory Task Force Recommendation. The parks levy does not solve, nor does it drive, the County's budget problem: the rest of the general budget challenge will remain with or without this levy. If the levy fails, major portions of the park system will be closed. If the levy passes, the system will be preserved. In either event, we will still have major budget challenges to face. The Budget Advisory Task Force is working through our budget challenge, and will make their recommendations to me later this year. I expect their input will be critically important to the larger challenge, and charting our future course.

Another issue that has been raised is whether city parks should be supported by some allocation of levy proceeds. I am not including funding for city-owned parks in this levy. There are 39 cities in King County. Virtually all of them have parks. Several of them have parks that are regional in nature. Determining an amount appropriate to support individual city park systems adds a major layer of complexity to this levy. It would also add significantly to the size of the levy. I believe we must resist the temptation to bulk-up this levy with special features, or invite complexity. Polling and focus groups clearly suggest that doing so risks failure.

All residents of King County have a stake in preserving our regional parks system, whether they live in cities or not. We all benefit from the over 25,000 acres of park lands, open space and trails that this levy will support—from the presence of incredible facilities such as Marymoor Park, the King County Aquatic Center, and Cougar Mountain Park. In sum, this levy request is small, and our message to the voters is clear: this money will support operation and maintenance of the County's regional and rural parks--parks used by all of us. Without this levy, the regional legacy that our parks represent will suffer greatly.

The voters deserve the opportunity to decide whether to protect this legacy. I respectfully request your support for placing this parks ballot measure, as proposed, before the voters of King County this May.

Sincerely,

Ron Sims  
King County Executive

Enclosures:

cc: King County Councilmembers

ATTN: David deCourcy, Chief of Staff  
Shelley Sutton, Policy Staff Director  
Mike Read, Lead Staff, NRPOS Committee  
Anne Noris, Clerk of the Council

Steve Call, Director, Office of Management and Budget

Pam Bissonnette, Director, Department of Natural Resources and Parks (DNRP)

**King County Parks Division**  
**2003 Budget and Forecasted 2004 to 2009 Revenues and Expenditures**  
in thousands (000s)

	No Levy	Proposed Statutory Rate of \$0.050/\$1000 AV					
	<u>2003 Adopted Budget<sup>1</sup></u>	<u>2004 Forecast</u>	<u>2005 Forecast</u>	<u>2006 Forecast</u>	<u>2007 Forecast</u>	<u>2008 Forecast</u>	<u>2009 Forecast</u>
<b>BEGINNING FUND BALANCE</b>	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 1,466	\$ 2,675	\$ 3,505	\$ 3,835	\$ 3,575
<b>REVENUES</b>							
Property Tax - current plus delinquencies <sup>2</sup>	-	11,661	12,077	12,421	12,767	13,090	13,418
Parks Generated Regional/Rural <sup>3</sup>	5,536	4,837	5,079	5,333	5,599	5,880	6,174
Parks Generated UGA <sup>3</sup>	1,226	1,288	1,352	1,420	1,491	1,565	1,643
Other Revenue <sup>4</sup>	9,619	3,022	3,189	3,368	3,581	3,812	4,061
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	16,381	20,808	21,697	22,542	23,438	24,347	25,296
<b>EXPENDITURES</b>							
Regional/Rural Parks <sup>5</sup>	12,657	13,832	14,690	15,606	16,648	17,766	18,965
Local/UGA Parks <sup>6</sup>	3,022	4,310	4,541	4,788	5,072	5,377	5,705
Increased Maintenance/Contingency <sup>7</sup>	-	900	948	1,000	1,059	1,123	1,191
Other Expenditures <sup>8</sup>	702	300	309	318	329	341	353
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES</b>	16,381	19,342	20,488	21,712	23,108	24,607	26,214
<b>ENDING FUND BALANCE</b>	-	1,466	2,675	3,505	3,835	3,575	2,657
Target Ending Fund Balance <sup>9</sup>							2,185

Forecasted Levy Rate:	0.0500	0.0486	0.0472	0.0459	0.0446	0.0433
Forecasted Gross Levy Proceeds:	\$ 11,869	\$ 12,165	\$ 12,470	\$ 12,784	\$ 13,104	\$ 13,432
Forecasted Assessed Value:	\$ 237,375,000	\$ 250,430,625	\$ 264,204,309	\$ 278,735,546	\$ 294,066,001	\$ 310,239,632

1: 2003 per Adopted Budget.

2: Levy increases by 1% per year plus new construction annually less delinquencies assumed at 1.75%.

3: Parks Generated Revenues for Regional, Rural, and UGA parks assumed to inflate in aggregate by 5% per year over the 2003 budget less 2003 allocation of SWM/Roads Funding in 2003.

4: Other Revenue consists of CX or other 3rd source of funding, and one time REET/CIP funding.

5,6: Regional/Rural Parks and Local/UGA Parks assumed to inflate the 2003 budget by the following:

Salary/Benefits inflate by the greater of 2% or 90% of forecasted CPI plus an increased rate for benefits

Non-Salary expenditures inflate at 100% of forecasted CPI

Overhead returns to 2001 levels

No Mothball Costs after 2003

Small annual increases in Res/Eco Land acreage and Regional Trails (purchased developed through REET/CFT funding)

NO UGA Parks transfers

7: Increased maintenance/contingency assumed at 5% of operating costs for Regional/Rural Parks; growing at the weighted average expenditure growth rate per Note 5,6 above.

8: Other Expenditures include 2003 Mothball costs and funding for regional partnerships 2004 to 2009, inflating annually by CPI. Additional funding for partnerships assumed through REET.



## **Selected Parks Division Accomplishments, since June 2002**

- County Executive proposed and County Council adopted a \$16.4 million parks operating budget for 2003.
- 8 of 10 in-city pools will be open in 2003 under transfer or operating agreements
- Negotiations on the remaining pool is ongoing
- 13 in-city parks were transferred to cities
- 10-12 more parks transfers are pending and expected to be completed in the first half of 2003
- The Omnibus Parks Ordinance was proposed by the County Executive and passed by the County Council, providing greater flexibility to the King County Parks in generating non-tax revenue in setting user fees
- New user fees, consistent with Task Force recommendations were effective in January, 2003
- A \$1 parking fee was implemented at Marymoor Park in February, 2003 and was well received
- An RFP for public-private ventures was issued in November, 2002
- 30 responses were received from the RFP, and numerous public-private ventures from the RFP will be implemented in 2003; these include pet-related amenities at Marymoor Park and a cross-country race series at Cougar Mountain
- King County Parks is working on re-issuing other RFPs to obtain additional public-private ventures that will bring appropriate amenities and recreational opportunities to King County Parks while providing additional operating revenue;
- Parks sponsorship deals have been proposed to both local and national companies
- An advertising sales plan is in development to provide additional sponsorship revenues at appropriate county facilities
- A major concert series, Concerts at Marymoor, was signed that will bring major musical acts to the park this summer, while generating revenue for King County Parks operations
- A comprehensive public outreach strategy was developed to keep stakeholders informed of the King County Parks transformation
- In the fall of 2002, a separate group formed a non-profit foundation to support King County Parks
- King County Parks is negotiating agreements with several user groups to help enhance King County facilities, while reducing maintenance costs
- An employee cost-saving team was formed and is now implementing its ideas

# **Impact of Increasing Operation and Maintenance Budget for King County Regional and Rural Parks**

Since 2001, the Parks operation and maintenance budget has dropped from \$12,144,841 to \$7,457,541, while Parks acreage has gone from 24,165 to 25,389.

## **\$800,000 Increase in Regional and Rural Parks Operation and Maintenance Budget will annually provide:**

- Better maintenance of athletic fields and sport courts through more frequent mowing, weeding, prepping and washing.
  - Mow athletic fields 2 times per week (currently only mowed 1 time per week) thus increasing safety of play and the overall aesthetics of the athletic fields are improved
  - Weed warning tracks – increasing safety for users as well as improving aesthetics
  - 288 additional field preps for user groups (includes dragging fields, lining fields, ensuring safe playing surface) –increase field preparations in excess of 10% compared to current levels
  - 19 additional power washes for 28 tennis courts resulting in cleaner and better maintained courts – This doubles the number of cleanings per year
- All parks would have cleaner bathrooms, trash would be picked up more regularly, graffiti would be removed,
  - Restrooms will cleaned more frequently
  - Mow 18,175 additional acres of land resulting in a more manicured park system for the public
  - Leaves will be picked up more frequently improving aesthetics by having a visually cleaner park, improving safety (less slippery surfaces by removing leaves), and improving drainage by clearing drains free of leaves
  - Litter and garbage removal frequency increased, resulting in a more attractive appearance for the park system
  - 39 additional acres of noxious weed removal per year
- Playgrounds would be cleaner and better maintained.
  - 253 more playground inspections – rake surface, inspect and remove hazards resulting in safer and cleaner playgrounds
- The quality of trails would improve including brushing back shrubs and removing fallen debris.
  - Cougar Mountain & Rattlesnake Mountain trail conditions will be improved-- repairing rutted trails, brushing back shrubs, and removal of fallen debris.
  - Regional trails will be mowed 4 times per year vs. 3 times per year thereby improving the visual appearance for users on these corridors
- Perform basic maintenance such as installing/repairing windows and doors, maintaining roofs, ceilings, tiles, siding, masonry, and sidewalks, graffiti removal, interior painting, resurfacing of gymnasium floors
- Preserves the capital investments for the park system by not deferring maintenance or capital needs by restoring carpenter and painting staff deleted from 2003 budget.



### **Comparative Recent Parks Levies in King County**

- 2002 Bellevue parks bond proposal of 21 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value (failed)
- 2002 Kirkland parks/bond and levy of 21 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value (passed)
- 2002 Enumclaw pool levy proposal of 16 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value (passed)
- 2002 Finn Hill Parks and Recreation District of 7.2 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value (passed)
- 2000 Seattle parks levy proposal of 35 to 33 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value (passed)

*Exhibit A*  
*List of King County Parks Facilities*

February 2003

*Regional Trails*

***North***

Burke Gilman Trail Site

***East***

East Lake Sammamish Trail Site

Klahanie Trail Site

Redmond Watershe Trail Site

Snoqualmie Valley Trail Site

East Plateau Trail Site

Preston Snoqualmie Trail Site

Sammamish River Trail Site

West Lake Sammamish Trail Site

***South***

Cedar River Trail Site

Enumclaw Plateau Trail Site

Green River to Cedar River Trail Site

Maple Valley Lake Wilderness Trail Site

Cedar River to Lake Sammamish Trail Site

Green River Trail Site

Lake Youngs Trail and Connector Trail Site

Soos Creek Trail Site

***Resource and Ecological Lands***

***North***

Bassett Pond Park

Bear Creek Waterway

Daniel's Creek Park

Bear Creek Park

Cold Creek Natural Area

Upper Bear Creek Conservation Area

***East***

Carnation Marsh

Evans Creek Park

Griffin Creek Park Natural Area

Kathryn C. Lewis Park

Little Si Park

Moss Lake Natural Area

Patterson Creek Park Natural Area

Ring Hill Park

Tolt River Natural Area

Chinook Bend Habitat Resource Area

Fall City Natural Area

Hazel Wolf Wetlands

Kimble Creek Site

Middle Fork Snoqualmie Park Natural Area

Nowak Park

Raging River Natural Area

Stillwater Park

Tollgate Farm

***South***

Auburn Narrows Park

Belmondo Beach

Big Bend Park

Bingaman Pond

Cavanaugh Pond

Christiansen Pond

Bass Lake Natural Area

Big Spring Creek Site

BN Peninsula

Cedar Grove Park

Covington Park

Crowe Marsh Natural Area

Dorre Don Left Bend Meander

Dorre Don Park

Flaming Geyser (adjacent to State Park)

Green River Park Natural Area  
Honeydew Park  
Hyde Lake Park  
Lake Desire Park  
Landsburg Reach  
Lower Peterson Creek Corridor  
Maple Ridge Highlands Open Space  
Neely Bridge Park  
O'Grady Property  
Porter Levee  
Rock Creek Reach  
Taylor Mountain Forest  
Wetland 79

Hatchery Park  
Horsehead Bend  
Kanaskat Natural Area  
Lake Desire Site 2  
Little Soos Creek Wetlands  
Lower Taylor Creek Site  
Metzler Park  
North Green River Park  
Peterson Lake Park Natural Area  
Ricardi Reach  
Sugarloaf Mountain Site  
Upper Rock Creek Natural Area  
White Center Bog

## ***Regional Active Facilities***

### ***North***

Big Finn Hill

### ***East***

Marymoor Park  
Tolt River John McDonald Park

### ***South***

Enumclaw Fairgrounds Complex  
Petrovitsky Park  
King County Aquatic Center

## ***Regional Passive Parks***

### ***East***

Cougar Mountain  
Coal Creek  
Grand Ridge Park  
Soaring Eagle (Section 36)

Squak Mountain/Squak/Tiger Corridor  
Duthie Hill Park  
Preston/Mitchell Hill Corridor

### ***South***

Maury Island Marine Park  
Spring Lake/Lake Desire Corridor

McGarvey Park Open Space

## ***Rural Parks and Facilities***

### ***North***

Cottage Lake Park  
Northshore Little League Ballfield  
Sixty Acres Park

Cottage Lake Pool  
Northshore Soccer Gardens

### ***East***

Canyon Creek Natural Area  
Estebo Park  
Fall City Community Park  
Fall City Quigley Park

Duvall Park

Fall City West Park  
Preston Community Center  
Rattlesnake Ridge (shared with State)  
Shamrock Park

Lake Joy Park  
Ravenhill Open Space  
Three Forks Natural Area

***South***

Cedar Downs Site  
Dockton Park  
Farmers Park  
Lake Francis Park  
Maple Valley Heights Park  
Mount Peak Site  
Vashon Pool

Coalfield Park  
Enumclaw Sportsman's Park  
Gracie Hansen Community Center  
Levdansky Park  
May Valley Park  
Ravensdale Park  
Whitney Bridge Park

Norman Bridge